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ABSTRACT

Educational improvement can occur if school decisionmaking is shifted from centralized, "top down" administration to individual school control cooperatively directed by the principal, the staff, and parents. Site-based management allows the school a high degree of autonomy by placing the responsibility and authority for decisions at the school level. The Bellevue, Washington, school district has identified 10 components of school-centered decisionmaking and renewal; a number of other school districts in the United States and Canada have developed similar site-based management programs. Included among the 10 components are: (1) establishing a framework through district mission statements and goals; (2) providing staff development and training guided by local school needs; and (3) maintaining a continuous dialog regarding roles at both the district and the school levels. In many states, county and regional education service districts provide support to local districts and serve as an intermediate agency between the state department of education and the local district. As schools are empowered to make their own decisions, in order to continue to play an important role in the education of students, education service districts must become more responsive and competitive in the delivery of their services to individual schools. (18 references) (KM)

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SITE BASED MANAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICTS

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During the 1980's educators have been inundated with calls for educational reform and improvement from scores of individuals, groups, commisions and committees. Most reforms have been directed and implemented from the federal, state, or district levels in the form of mandates related to the length of school years, curriculum, and teacher preparation. While in some cases these mandates have been helpful, most often the changes imposed from the top down have been ineffective in achieving true and long lasting educational reform and have not achieved the desired outcomes of improved teaching and learning sustained over time. Recent research has shown school improvement can occur, schools and students can become more successful and maintain that success over time, if decision making regarding school improvement is shifted from a centralized and top down manner to one that occurs at and is directed by individual schools in a manner involving the participation of individual school principals, staff and parents (Burns and Howes, 1988; Carr, 1988; House and Boetz, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1984, 1987). As school site decision making about curriculum, instruction, staffing, and related budget needs becomes more prevalent, changes must occur in the service delivery of district central offices, state and federal departments of education, and regional education service districts in ways that further empower local schools to meet their school improvement needs.

Site based management has been identified as one of the key elements of effective schools and school districts (Futrell, 1989; Guthrie, 1986; Mojkowski and Fleming, 1988; Purkey and Smith, 1985). The ability of local school principals, staff, and parents to make and implement meaningful decisions about school programs, staffing, and budgets in ways that improve teaching and learning at the local school level is seen as key to improving schools and sustaining those improvements over time. Between 1983 and 1985 over 700 statutes were enacted by state legislatures in reaction to the report A Nation at Risk. These statutes stipulated "What should be taught, when it should be taught, how it should be taught, and by whom it should be taught" (Futrell, 1989, p.11). Teachers and principals were faced with more responsibility, more to do, and less authority and less power with which to do it. Decision making authority for school reform had been further removed from principals and teachers and placed more in the realm of legislators, regulators, and other non-educators. Most top down reforms did not work. By 1986 a number of reports and a growing body of research showed top-down regulation as a means to school improvement was ineffective and that a move toward decentralization to the school site level was essential if sustained school improvement was to succeed (Futrell, 1989; Gutherie, 1986). These conclusions are further supported by a large body of organization and change literature

summarized by Bolman and Deal (1984), Hersey and Blanchard (1988), Owens (1987), and Schmuch and Runkel (1988).

Argyris (1964) describes healthy organizations as those which achieve their goals, maintain themselves internally, and adapt to changes in their environment. Miles (1965) further identifies indicators of organizational health and success as:

1. The extent to which people in an organization understand and accept goals as achievable and appropriate.
2. The adequacy of communication, both internal and external, horizontal and vertical.
3. The extent to which collaboration, not coercion, determines power equalization.
4. The manner in which personnel are used effectively and in ways that cause them to feel they are growing and developing on the job and as persons.
5. The extent of cohesiveness between individuals and the organization.
6. The extent of feelings of well-being and satisfaction resulting in high morale.
7. The tendency to be innovative in devising new procedures and goals.
8. The ability to change, correct, and adapt faster than the environment.
9. The ability to sense and perceive problems and solutions with a minimum of strain.

Healthy and successful school districts can only be achieved if individual schools within school districts are also healthy and successful. Site based management, with its focus on local people making decisions about local improvement efforts, holds promise as the means to such success.

Site based management has been described as a process that places the responsibility and authority for decisions at the individual school level (Mojkowski and Fleming, 1988). More specifically, site based management involves a shared decision making processes developed and implemented at local schools, includes principals, staff, parents, and, in some cases, students (Dreyfuss, 1988), and is aimed at local school improvement needs. Site based management allows local schools a high degree of autonomy in making decisions about:

1. Staff: hiring, numbers of teachers and support personnel, and staffing patterns and assignments. In highly centralized districts those decisions are made by the central office. In site based managed programs those decisions are made by principals, staff and, sometimes, parents.
2. Curriculum and instruction. While there is a need for broad curriculum and instructional goals at the district level in order to achieve continuity, individual schools function more effectively and achieve greater success if decisions regarding the

implementation of curriculum and specific instructional methods are made by those schools and geared to local school improvement needs.

3. Staff development. Staff development aimed at improving the skills of staff and their ability to achieve individual schools' teaching and learning goals is best determined by local schools in light of their school improvement needs.
4. Budget decisions. If site based management is to be effectively implemented, schools must be allowed discriminatory decision making power over 80 to 90 percent of their total budgets. Without the ability to decide how to allocate and manage their budgets, local school ability to achieve school improvement goals is greatly hampered, if not eliminated.

In order for site based management to succeed, school districts, regional education service districts, and state and federal education agencies must empower and support local school decision making in these areas.

The Bellevue, Washington school district has identified ten components of school centered decision making and renewal (O'Niel, 1988):

1. Do not have a single model. School improvement decisions are unique to individual schools and their needs.
2. Establish a clear framework through district mission

statements and goals adopted by the board and reflecting school needs, district needs, collective bargaining agreements, and state and federal law.

3. Use sufficient consensus, not consensus, in order to implement at least interim decisions and to allow flexibility.
4. Do not replace the principal with a committee. The principal remains the key figure for the successful implimentation of site based management, shared decision making, and school improvement.
5. Provide training through staff development guided by local school needs.
6. Provide discretion in decision making and spending broad enough to allow for individual school autonomy and significant decision making.
7. Develop an information base through research that provides site specific information on school improvement needs and available resources.
8. Maintain a continuous dialog about roles at both the distict and school levels in the site based management process.
9. Do not undercut decision makers at the local school level by second guessing or changing decisions made by local schools within the established district framework.
10. Model desired behaviors throughout the organization, at the central office and board levels.

A number of school districts across the United States and Canada have developed similar site based management programs (Edmonton, Alberta; Hammond Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Chesterfield, Missouri; Dade County, Florida; Richardson, Texas). An increasing number of states have also implemented programs, often through legislation, that supports and encourages site based management (Connecticut School Improvement Program; Oregon House Bill 2020, School Improvement and Professional Development Grant Program, and House Bill 2001; Washington State Schools for the Twenty-First Century). In addition, national, state, and local teacher and administrator associations, regional laboratories, and educational service districts have developed courses, training programs, and leadership academies aimed at developing the skills needed to implement site based management. Of these organizations, county or regional education service districts are often the least understood and most under-utilized agencies in the school improvement process. However, education service districts hold promise as key resources in the development, support, and implementation of school improvement through site based management.

In many states, county and regional education service districts exist to provide support to local districts and to serve as an intermediate agency between the state department of education and the local district. The purposes and functions of education service districts vary from state to

state but often include the provision of a variety of instructional and support programs to school districts in a manner that is more cost effective than each district could provide on its own. For example, the Washington County (Oregon) Education Service District has adopted the following mission st. ement and goals from which it serves thirteen school districts and 50,000 students (Christiansen, 1989):

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide educational and support services to and for the local school districts to help them provide the best education possible, as equally as possible, to the students of Washington County.

DISTRICT GOALS

In realizing the above mission statement, the Washington County Education Service District will focus primary attention on:

I. Improvement of Instruction, with emphasis on curriculum development in basic skills (including science and social studies), staff development, use of technology, and innovative programs.

II. Financial Resources, through alternative funding sources, sound fiscal management, inter-agency cooperatives and joint ventures, cost effective contractual agreements and educational marketing.

III. Alternative Learning Opportunities for students through vocational, technical, special and outdoor education and other approaches to learning.

IV. Establishing Productive Relationships with local school districts, the State Department of Education, the legislature and educational support groups.

It is understood the above focus will be accomplished within the scope of other regular Education Service District programs. The District will continue close communication with local districts in the evaluation of existing programs and processes to obtain information to improve current services or to establish new areas which should be served.

Such a mission statement and set of goals allows any education service district to support and assist local

districts and individual schools in their efforts to improve their programs through site based management.

Many education service districts provide direct instruction for students, across district lines and in a manner that is more cost effective for local districts, in such areas as high cost special education programs, alternative education, outdoor and environmental education, distance learning instruction, guidance and counseling activities, early childhood education programs, high school completion programs, activities for talented and gifted students, and student assessment and evaluation. Most often placement of students in these programs is made through local district central office administrators. As districts move to a site based management program such decisions must be made by local school administrators and staff. Education service districts must be prepared to meet not only the needs of districts in a broad sense, but also the specific instructional needs of local schools and their students. Service districts may need to develop a broader base of possible direct instruction activities, options, and programs and be prepared to meet the needs of local schools in a way that is more entrepreneural as schools seek services they cannot directly provide their students in a cost effective mannner.

Education service districts also provide consultation services in such areas as career and vocational education, curriculum development, methods of instruction, compliance

with state and federal statutes and regulations, administrative practices, and program evaluation. Again, education service districts must shift the focus and delivery of their services more toward individual schools as districts move to site based management.

Service districts often provide school districts with support services in the areas of audio-visual technology, equipment repair, centralized film and vidio libraries, cooperative purchasing of supplies and equipment, the transportation of special education students, and centralized data processing in the areas of student and personnel records, payroll, accounts payable, and budget development and management. While some support services are geared toward individual schools, a shift in others toward a more site specific delivery system must be achieved. For example, if local schools are involved in decision making about their budgets, education service districts must be prepared to provide data processing regarding students, personnel, budget development, and budget management to individual school sites and the cost centers within those sites. This may involve not only computer programming decisions but also may influence service district equipment purchases and the allocation of data processing resources more toward local schools than toward district central offices.

Education service districts provide staff development activities for teachers and administrators in curriculum,

instruction, group process and leadership skills. Too often these staff development opportunities are presented in a generalized, menue oriented or "shotgun" approach aimed at a broad audience of teachers and administrators. As schools identify their improvement and related staff development needs, education service districts must be prepared to offer site specific staff development activities to teachers and administrators in local schools, activites geared not only toward the curriculum and instructional needs of individual schools, but also toward the specific skills needed by administrators and staff to develop and implement site based management. These may include site specific staff development in budgeting, program evaluation, interpretation of assessment results, communicating, decision making, problem solving, conflict management, and leadership skills.

While communication and coordination between education service districts and local school district central office administrators remains essential, there must be a shift in communications and the delivery of services more toward individual school sites if education service districts are to meet the changing requirements of schools and districts implimenting site based management organizational structures. As schools are empowered to make their own decisions about curriculum, instruction, staff development, budgeting, and the acquisition of resources necessary to meet their school improvement needs, education service districts must become more responsive and competitive in the

delivery of their services to individual schools. The marketing and delivery of high quality services to individual schools in such areas as educational consulting, staff development, direct instruction, and data processing must become the focus of education service districts if they are to meet the challenges of site based management, assist schools in improving teaching and learning, and continue to play an important role in the education of students.

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